



Leadership & Performance

The power of teams and how create the right environment to harness it

The Author:

Dr. Annette Towler

Annette Towler was born in England and now lives in the United States. She has a PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology and has taught at several institutions. Annette has published in several journals, including Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, Human Resource Development Quarterly, and Organizational Research Methods. She worked in the public and private sector for many years, primarily as a management trainer.



CQ Net is the evidence-based management (EBM) team learning platform. Learn strategies & interventions that have been supported by scientific research. This CQ Dossier is part of the Evidence-Based Management Learning Team "How can leadership enhance team and company performance?".

Executive summary

This CQ Dossier describes the key characteristics of effective teams. The paper draws on research that show how effective teams operate through coordination, communication, and shared cognition. The dossier describes how organizations can provide human resource practices such as employee training to ensure that teams are successful in reaching their missions and goals.

Teams have task-relevant knowledge, share a high level of communication and adapt to the environment

The importance of work in teams has grown over the last ten years. In the past, organizations focused on individual performance through careful crafting of well-defined roles. There has been a dilution in the clear delineation of duties with organizations placing an increasing interest in high performing teams. This paper focuses on providing an understanding of how teams develop, team roles, dynamics, and the attributes of highly effective teams. Organizations have focused on using teams to increase organizational effectiveness yet many of these practices have not always been based on scientific principles. Teams are social in nature with team members having high task interdependency and shared, common values (Salas, Cooke & Rosen, 2008). Teams have task-relevant knowledge, share a high level of deep communication, and adapt to the environment. Effective teams are those that display teamwork skills, which are competencies that enable people to contribute effectively to teams. In addition, team members need task work skills, which are related to doing individual jobs correctly; these skills are also necessary to be able to effectively contribute to the team and act as a precursor (Salas et al., 2008).

Effective teamwork is build on seven major components

There are seven major components of effective teamwork and they are: competence, cooperation, coordination, communication, cognition, coaching and conditions (Tannenbaum et al., 2012). These drivers are crucial for effective team work.

Competence is the knowledge, skills and abilities that each team possesses on an individual and collective level. Cooperation refers to having the right attitudes about teamwork so that there is more of a focus on 'us' rather than on 'I'. It is important that teams have members with a collective orientation so that the team becomes effective. One of the most important factors in effective teamwork is coordination where the individual skills of each team member is utilized for the team to run effectively. This can be a behavior such as providing backup when it is needed. It is important that teams are clear about the behaviors that are needed within the team to succeed. Communication is at the heart of effective teamwork and includes communication between team members and with people outside the team (Salas, Rico & Passmore, 2017).

Quality of communication, availability of shared mental models and distributed leadership impacts team performance

Effective communication can greatly enhance team effectiveness. High quality communication is better than a large amount of communication. Team cognition is important because attitudes and thoughts can influence behavior. It is important that teams are consistent regarding what they think matters and that they share the same mental models. Teams can also be trained to build shared mental models of situation, task environment, and interactions with team members to increase the team's ability to function well, particularly in stressful conditions. Coaching or leadership is important within teams to enhance team effectiveness. Anyone within the team can show important leadership skills so the role does not need to be formalized. What is important is that effective leadership behaviors are demonstrated to help the team succeed. The final component labelled conditions refers to the organizational environment in which the team operates. It is important that organizations provide teams with sufficient resources and also that there is a cooperative organizational climate to help teams be successful.

High performance teams continuously proceed through various teamwork processes

Teams generally work best when they proceed effectively through various teamwork processes including the transition process, action process, and interpersonal process (LePine, Piccolo, Jackson, Mathieu & Saul, 2008). The transition process occurs between key events and effective teams refocus and analyze the mission of the team, specify their goals and formulate the strategy. This is a recurring process whereby goals are aligned with the mission of the team and the team focuses on the strategies that are needed to enact the goals. During the action process the team attempts to accomplish its goals objectives. Successful teams constantly monitor progress towards their goals, monitor team and backup behavior and engage in coordination. During the action and transition periods, successful teams engage in interpersonal behaviors that enable the team to perform effectively. The ability to handle conflict, raising motivation and confidence building, and managing appropriate emotional responses are indicative of successful teams.

It is also important that teams are given organizational support to help them function effectively. In particular, research has found that team training can promote teamwork behaviors and enhance performance (Salas, Cooke & Rosen, 2008). A meta-analytic review of the literature also found that team training was positively related to effective training outcomes, including team processes and performance (Salas et al., 2008).

Ineffective team tend to engage in social loafing

Teams that are ineffective tend to engage in social loafing when team members do not contribute to the overall mission of the team. However, there are examples of teams who exceed the expectations of members' combined skills and this results in a process called social laboring (West, 2012). Teams that engage in social labor demonstrate a high motivation to fulfil the team tasks, identify strongly as a team, and have a collectivistic team culture (West, 2012). There are other situations in which teams can be effective. Teams can be useful for problem-solving particularly when team members offer unique perspectives on how to solve a problem. Teams that are effective in

problem-solving engage in collaboration among team members where there is effective communication, coordination and mutual support (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). There is a positive relationship between teamwork and team effectiveness (LePine et al., 2008).

This paper provides an overview of effective teamwork. The research on teams show that effective teams consist of competent team members with a variety of skills and are able to work effectively together on the team's mission through coordination and effective communication. Effective teams are also aware of each team member's knowledge, skills, and abilities, and ensure that these are used within the context of the team. It is important for organizations to provide teams with training and development, so they are equipped with the necessary teamwork skills to perform effectively.

Key take-aways

- Effective teamwork is related to team performance
- Effective teams are well-coordinated so that each team member's skills are well utilized
- The ability to handle conflict, raise motivation, build confidence and manage appropriate emotional responses are indicative of successful teams
- Effective communication can greatly enhance team effectiveness
- Teams that engage in social labor are effective

References

- Hoegl, M., & Gemuenden, H. G. (2001). "Teamwork Quality and the Success of Innovative Projects: a Theoretical Concept and Empirical Evidence". *Organization Science*. 12 (4): 435–449.
- LePine, J. A., Piccolo, R. F., Jackson, C. L., Mathieu, J.E. & Saul, J. R. (2008). "A Meta- Analysis of Teamwork Processes: Tests of a Multidimensional Model and Relationships with Team Effectiveness Criteria". *Personnel Psychology*. 61 (2): 273–307.
- Salas, E., Cooke, N. J., & Rosen, M.A. (2008). "On Teams, Teamwork, as well as Team Performance: Discoveries and Developments". *Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society*. 50 (3): 540–547.
- Salas, E. Diazgranados, D., Klein, C., Shawn Burke, C. Stagl, K.C., Goodwin, G. F., Halpin, S. M. (2008). Does team training improve team performance? A meta-analysis. *Human factors*, 50, 6, 903-933.
- Salas, E., Rico, R., & Passmore, J. (2017). *The psychology of team working and collaborative processes*. Wiley Blackwell: Chichester, West Sussex.
- Tannenbaum, S. I., Mathieu, J. E., Salas, E., & Cohen, D. (2012). Teams are changing: Are research and practice evolving fast enough? *Industrial and Organizational psychology*.
- West, M. A. (2012): *Effective Teamwork: Practical Lessons from Organizational Research*. Third Edition.

CQ Net is the evidence-based management team learning platform

From speculation to impact. Learn how evidence-based management can make a difference for you and your organization.



Evidence-based

Our learning teams bridge the gap between social sciences and business such that evidence-based knowledge becomes accessible for managers and professionals.



Agile learning

Our agile team learning approach connects evidence-based knowledge with real life challenges. This increases learning transfer, is a great deal of fun.



100% online

We apply secure cutting edge Open Source Technology for time & space independent online collaboration.



Co-creation

The combination of evidence-based knowledge with the learning team members' individual experiences provides the perfect starting point for knowledge co-creation.

WHO WE ARE

CQ Net is the evidence-based management (EBM) team learning platform. Learn strategies & interventions that have been supported by scientific research.

Follow us on

[Linkedin](#)/[Twitter](#)/[Facebook](#)

WHY CHOOSE US

1. Learn what really counts based on cutting edge science.
2. Learn time & space independent in a safe online platform.
3. Learn from & with others in a team setting that motivates.
4. Learn about the most pressing "Human Factor" issues.